

# THE METHODS OF MORIS KLAU

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**D**URING that autumn I was sharing a pleasant set of rooms with Mark Lesty, who was shortly taking up an appointment at a London hospital, and it was, I think, about the middle of that month that the extraordinary affair of Halesowen and his Egyptian potsherd came under our notice.

Our rooms (they were in a south-west suburb) overlooked a fine expanse of common. Halesowen rented a flat commanding a similar prospect, and at the time of which I write he had but recently returned from a protracted visit to Egypt.

Halesowen was a tall, fair man, clean-shaven, very fresh colored and wearing his hair cropped close to his head. He was well traveled and no mean antiquary.

He lived entirely by himself, and Lesty and I frequently spent the evening at his place, which was a veritable museum of curiosities.

I distinctly recall the first time that he showed us his latest acquisitions.

We had been examining the relics that Halesowen had brought back from the land of the Pharaohs; the one, I remember, which had most impressed me, was that of a mummy of a sacred cat from Bubastis.

"It wouldn't have been worth bringing back only for the wrapping," Halesowen assured me. "This, now, is really unique!"

The object referred to was a broken pot or vase, upon which he pointed out a number of hieroglyphics and a figure with the head of a jackal.

"A potsherd inscribed with the figure of Anubis," he explained. "Very valuable."

"Why?" Lesty inquired in his lazy way.

"Well," Halesowen replied, "the characters of the inscription are of a kind entirely unfamiliar to me. I believe them to be a sort of secret writing, possibly peculiar to some brotherhood, I am risking expert opinion, although in every sense I stole the thing!"

"How's that?" I asked.

"Well, Professor Sheraton—you'll see his name on a row of cases in the British Museum—excavated it. But it's a moral certainty he didn't intend to advise the authorities of his find. He was going to smuggle it out of Egypt into his private collection. I had marked the spot where he found it for inquiries of my own. This dishonest old fossil!"

Lesty laughed.

"Oh, my motives weren't above suspicion. But anyway the professor anticipated me. Accordingly I employed one of the distinguished members of a family of thieves, to visit the learned gentleman's tent. Cutting the story—there's the pot!"

"Here, I say," drawled Lesty. "You'll come to a bad end, young fellow."

"The position is a peculiar one," replied Halesowen smiling. "Neither of us had any legal claim to the sherd—while we were on Egyptian territory. Therefore, even if the professor learned that I had the thing—and he may suspect—he couldn't prosecute me."

"Devilish high-handed," commented Lesty.

"Yes. But remember we were well off the map—miles away from Cook's route. The possession of this potsherd ought to make a man's reputation—any man who knows a bit about the subject."

"Curiously enough, a third party had had his eye upon the place where this much-sought sherd was found. And in some mysterious fashion he stumbled to the fact that it had fallen into my hands."

"He made a sort of valiant offer of a hundred pounds for it. I refused, but ran across him again a week or so later in Cairo, and he raised his price to two hundred."

"That's strange," I said. "Who was he?"

"Called himself Zeda—Dr. Louis Zeda. He quite lost his temper when I declined to sell, and I've not set eyes on him since."

He relocked the fragment in his cabinet, and we lapsed into silence, set to gazing meditatively across the common, picturesque in the dim, autumn twilight.

"By the way, Halesowen," I said, "I see that the flat next door, same floor as this, is let."

"That's so," he replied. "Why don't you men take it?"

"We'll think about it," yawned Lesty, stretching his long limbs luxuriously. "Might look over it in the morning."

The following day we viewed the vacant flat, but found, upon inquiry of the agent, that it had already been let. However, as our own rooms suited us very well, we were not greatly concerned.

Just as we finished dinner the same evening Halesowen came in, and without preamble plunged into a surprising tale of uncanny happenings at his place.

"Take it slowly," warned Lesty, interrupting. "You say it was after we came away?"

"About an hour after," replied Halesowen nervously. "I had brought out the potsherd, and had it in the wooden stand on the table before me. I was copying the hieroglyphics, which, as I said, are unusual, and had only my reading lamp burning, the rest of the room being, consequently, in shadow."

"I was sitting with my back to the window facing the door, so no one could possibly have entered the room unseen by me. It was as I bent down to scrutinize a badly defaced character that I felt a queer sensation stealing over me, as though some one were standing close behind my chair watching me."

"Very common," explained Lesty. "Merely nerves."

"Yes, I know; but not what followed. This sensation became so pronounced that I stood up. No one was in the room."

"I determined to take a stroll, concluding that the fresh air would clear these uncanny cobwebs out of my brain. Accordingly I extinguished the lamp and went out. I was just putting my cap on when something prompted me to return and look up the potsherd."

He fixed his eyes upon us with an expression of doubt.

"There was some one or something in the room?"

"What do you mean?" asked Lesty incredulously.

"I quite distinctly saw a hand and bare white arm pass away from the table, remember; but I could see the arm well enough. I switched on the reading lamp. Not a thing was to be seen. There was no one in the room, and no one but myself in the flat, for I searched it thoroughly."

Halesowen's nerves evidently had been shaken by the inexplicable incident. As the three of us strode back across the common he informed us that the new tenant of the adjoining flat had moved in.

We ascended upstairs and into the cozy room which had been the scene of the remarkable occurrence related.

As it was growing dark, Halesowen turned on the electric light, and, indicating a chair by the writing table, explained that it was there he had been seated at the time.

"Do you have the windows open?" asked Lesty.

"Yes," was the reply. "I left the chairs and the awning out, too, as it was a fine night; in fact, you can see that the windows remain practically as you left them."

Apparently Lesty was about to make some observation when an interruption occurred in the form of a ringing bell, followed by a discreet fangding on the knocker.

"Who the deuce have we here?" muttered Halesowen. "I saw no one go in below."

As our host passed through the lighted room and into the hall, my friend and I both leaned forward in our chairs, the better to hear what should pass; nor were we kept long in suspense. As we heard the outer door opened, an odd, mumbling voice came, with a queer accent:

"Ah, my dear Mr. Halesowen, it is indeed a pleasure to see you. But when I find how we are neighbors I cannot resist to make the call and renew a so pleasant acquaintance!"

"Dr. Zeda," we heard Halesowen exclaim, with little cordiality.

"Ever your devoted servant," replied the courteous foreigner.

I glanced at Lesty, and we rose together and stepped through the open doorway in time to see a truly remarkable personage enter.

He was a large-framed man, with snow-white hair cut close to his skull, French fashion. He had a high and very wrinkled brow and wore gold-rimmed pince-nez.

Jet black and heavy eyebrows were his, and his waxed mustache and hair were likewise of the hue of coal.

His complexion was pallid; and in his well-cut coat, with a loose black tie overhanging his vest, he made a striking picture, bowing profoundly in the doorway.

Halesowen rapidly muttered the usual formalities, in fact, I remember mentally contrasting our friend's unceremonious manners with the courtesy of the doctor of Dr. Zeda.

The latter explained that he had taken the adjacent flat, having learned that that evening whom he had for a neighbor. Despite the lateness of the hour, he said, he could not resist the desire to see Halesowen, of whose company in Egypt he retained such pleasant memories.

When after a brief chat, the foreign gentleman rose to take his leave, he extended an invitation to all of us to lunch with him the following day.

Though I half expected Halesowen would decline, he did not do so; I therefore accepted, as did Lesty.

Whereupon Zeda departed, and Halesowen, returning to the chair which he had vacated to usher out his visitor, lighted a cigarette, regarded it for a moment meditatively, and then frankly expressed his doubts.

"He's been watching me," he said, "and when he saw the next flat vacant he jumped at the chance."

On the following day we were surprised at the orderly state of his establishment. Everything, from floor to ceiling, was in its proper place.

Thoroughly enjoying my visit, for he proved an excellent host, and I think even Lesty grew less suspicious of him. During the weeks that followed the doctor came several times to our rooms, and we frequently met at Halesowen's.

Then, about seven o'clock one morning when the mist hung low over the common in promise of a hot day, a boy came for Lesty and myself with news of a fresh development.

He was a lad who did odd jobs for Halesowen, and he brought word of an attempted burglary, together with a request that we should go over without delay.

Our curiosity keenly aroused, we were soon with our friend, and found him seated in the familiar room before a large cabinet with double glass doors. It was clearly evident that it had been ransacked hastily.

Other cases in which he kept various curios were open, and the place was in general disorder.

"What's gone?" asked Lesty quickly.

"Nothing," was the answer. "The potsherd is in the safe, and the safe is in my bedroom—or perhaps something might have gone?"

"You lock it up at night, then?" I thought you kept it in the cabinet."

"Only during the day. It goes in the safe, with other or two other trifles, at night; but everybody doesn't know that."

We looked at one another silently; but the name that was on all our lips remained unspoken, for we were startled by a loud knocking and ringing at the door.

When Carter opened it into the room ran Dr. Zeda.

"Oh, my friends!" he cried in his hoarse, rumbling voice, "there has been to my flat a midnight robber. He has turned completely upside down all my collection."

I watched the foreigner staring about the disordered room and noted the growing look of bewilderment creeping over his pallid countenance. I was compelled to admit to myself that here was either a consummate actor or a man of whom we hastily had formed a most unwarrantable opinion.

"But my friend—my good Halesowen," he exclaimed with widely opened eyes and extended palms. "What is it that I see? You are as disordered as myself!"

Halesowen nodded. "The burglar gave me a call, too," he said grimly.

## The Potsherd of Anubis

"My dear sir," gasped Zeda, seizing the speaker's arm. "Tell me quickly—what is it?"

Halesowen glanced at him rather hard. "No," he answered.

"Ah! what a relief I feared—" rumbled the doctor. "But perhaps you wonder for what it is?"

"I can guess."

"You need no longer guess; I will tell you. It is for your fragment of the sacred vase, and to me they come for mine!"

We were even more astonished by this assertion than we had been by the doctor's first.

"Your fragment," said Halesowen slowly, with his eyes fixed on Zeda. "To what fragment do you refer?"

"To that which, together with your potsherd, makes up the complete vase. But you doubt?" he suggested, shrugging his shoulders.

"Wait but a moment and I will prove it."

He moved from the room. Then we stood and gaped at one another.

"His confound ingenuity," rapped Halesowen, "has completely tied my hands!"

thing—held it aloft that the initiated might worship, until the first white beam lit up the receptacle. Then all bowed down their heads and chanted the "Hymn of the Passing Souls."

"Then was it locked again within the three-and-thirty doors, there to remain for another year. None saw the symbol itself, but the high priest, who looked upon it when he was so ordained—for any other that gazed upon it died."

"It was contained in a holy vase."

I could almost believe him to have witnessed the strange rites that he told of with such conviction.

"In a year so long ago," he softly resumed, his voice now a kind of jagged whisper, "that to speak of its date were to convey nothing to you, the high-born virgin on whom the exalted office was conferred closed upon her unhappy soul the gates of paradise for ages unnumbered; called down upon her head the curse of the high priest and the anger of the most high gods; was rejected of Set himself, and her hands the sacred vase, and the holy symbol was lost to the children of earth for evermore."

them we shall beware, my friends, for we know they design upon us!"

With that and a low bow he retired. We usually took tea in the afternoon, and Halesowen joined us on this occasion. About 5 o'clock Dr. Zeda also looked in.

He remained until it began to grow dark, when we all went over to Halesowen's to arrange the first sitting—for so the doctor referred to the projected seance.

Retiring for a few minutes to his own establishment, Zeda returned with the iron box and explained what he proposed to do.

"Around this small table we sit, as at seance," he said; "but no medium—only the potsherd. With these flexible bands I will attach, temporarily, the parts and stand the vase in Mr. Halesowen's frame, here by the window—so that we will place the lamp—shaded thus—so that a dim light is upon it in the dark. We will now wait until it is more dusk."

Accordingly we went out on the balcony.



"With those flexible bands I will attach, temporarily, the parts—"

Being interrupted at this moment by the re-entrance of the gentleman in question, further discussion of the subject was precluded. Zeda carried a small iron box, which he placed carefully upon the table and unlocked.

A second box of polished ebony was revealed within, and this being unlocked in turn, proved to contain, resting in a nest of blue velvet, a fragment of antique pottery.

Taking the fragment in his hand, the doctor begged that the potsherd be produced.

Halesowen, after a momentary hesitation, retired from the room, to return almost immediately with the broken vase in its wooden frame. Dr. Zeda, placing the portion which he held in his hand against that in the frame, but not so closely as to bring the parts in contact, turned to us with a triumphant smile. "They correspond, gentlemen, to a smallest fraction," he declared; which, indeed, was perfectly true.

"And now," continued Zeda, evidently gratified by the surprise which we could not conceal. "I will relate to you a story. I do not ask that you shall credit it; I only say that I have given my life to such studies, and that I am willing, as matters have so arrived, that you shall join me to prove false or true what I think of the potsherd of Anubis."

"Good," said Lesty, and settled himself to listen; an example that was followed by Halesowen and myself.

"The date is no matter," said Dr. Zeda, "but there was at Gizeh, to the north of the Sphinx, a temple dedicated to Isis."

"Here the gods of the dead were adored—but the worship of Anubis took precedence, and was conducted at a shrine apart. Here, locked within three-and-thirty doors, having each its separate janitor who held the key, reposed a sacred symbol—a symbol, my friends, upon which was based the occult knowledge of the initiated; a symbol more precious than the lives of a hundred hundred warriors—for so it is written!"

The mysterious foreign gentleman looked about him with a sort of challenge in his glance; then he quietly resumed his story.

"At the change of the moon in the sacred month, Methori, a Balidan selected from a noble house for her beauty and purity, and for a whole year dedicated to the service of the gods, held in her hands the sacred

lost was the key to the book of wisdom; closed was that book to man for all time."

"Go on!" said Halesowen harshly, for Zeda had paused again.

"You do not grasp?" asked the doctor. "Well, then, know that the sentence was: 'Until the parts of this vase be made whole again.'"

"Five fragments were there. A large one, which is your potsherd, and four smaller. The four smaller, after twenty years of untiring search, I have recovered and joined together. What if we now make whole that which was broken?"

"May I not, by the exercise of such poor shreds of the lost wisdom as I have gathered up, summon before me that wandering spirit ere it return again to plead for rest at the judgment seat of Amen?"

When I say that the man's words proved electrical, I do not exaggerate the effect which this astounding proposition had upon us.

Halesowen was fairly startled out of his chair, and stood with his eyes fixed on the other in a fascinated gaze.

Zeda, entirely returning to his customary urbanity, shrugged and smiled.

"You believe my story?"

Lesty was the first to recover himself, and his reply was characteristic.

"Can't say I do," he drawled. "I don't say that you may not, though."

"Then do you not owe it to assist in proving my words?" A little seance? You are skeptical, quite. Very well; I try to show you. If I fail, then it is unfortunate, but I to an inevitable!"

We looked at each other interrogatively; and then Halesowen answered: "All right. It's a queer yarn, but we leave the matter entirely in your hands."

"Shall we say tonight to begin?" he said tentatively.

"By all means."

The doctor expressed himself delighted, and carefully relocking the fragment of the vase in its double case, he was about to depart when a point occurred to me.

"Might I ask whom you suspect of the attempted burglary?" I said.

He turned in the door and fixed a strange glance upon me.

"There are others," he replied, "who seek as I seek, and who do not scruple to gain their ends how they may. Of

The table rocked and gave forth crackling sounds.

There was no other manifestation, and about half past ten, the doctor again terminated the seance.

"Excellent!" said Zeda enthusiastically. "Excellent! We were in rapport, and within the circle there was power. Tomorrow, shall I triumph, my friends, but there is again an alteration that occurs to me."

"You, Mr. Clifford, shall sit next to Mr. Lesty on the left. Mr. Halesowen shall be upon his right, and I facing Mr. Lesty between. Also, there is too much light from the lamps in the room."

"It is good, I think, to have open the windows, but this Japanese screen will keep out that too much light and shelter the vase. Tomorrow we will observe these things."

This, then, concluded our second sitting, and brings me to the final episode of that affair, which, strange enough in its several developments, was stranger still in its denouement.

Zeda, on the following day, entertained us at luncheon in town, followed by an afternoon concert for which he had procured seats, being interested, or professing to be, in a certain fiddler who figured largely in the program.

We had arranged that Halesowen and the doctor should dine with us in the evening, before we went to the former's flat for the seance, and we accordingly returned direct to our rooms and chatted over the doings of the day until dinner was served. Zeda surpassed himself in brilliant conversation.

About 9 o'clock we walked over in the dark to our friend's flat, where we had so grope for and light on oil lamp the lamp behind the vase, which we carried something in the atmosphere was propitious and that the electric light would tend to disturb these favorable conditions.

It was perhaps a quarter to ten before Zeda had matters arranged to his satisfaction, and so dark by reason of the opening windows that I could see neither Zeda, on my left nor Lesty, who sat on my right.

Halesowen was a dim silhouette against the patch of light cast by the oil lamp, and Zeda's stiff "good evening" was the length of the room away.

I was conscious of a suppressed excitement, which I am sure was shared by my companions.

I heard a distant clock striking the half-hour and then the three-quarters, but still nothing had occurred.

A motor car drove around from the road and stopped somewhere at the outer end of the drive. I seemed to feel it were that of the surgeon who lived at No. 16.

After that everything was very quiet, and I was expecting to hear the hour strike and Zeda's stiff "good evening" rather late at the end of every third bar, or so, and this over and over again an easy thing, vaguely like a Gregorian chant.

"Triumph!" whispered Zeda—"The Hymn of the Passing Souls!"

His speech seemed to disturb the singer, but only for a moment. The hymn was continued.

Then, as the very monotony of the thing was beginning to grow appalling, I suddenly became aware of a slim, white figure standing beside the vase.

The chant stopped, and I could hear nothing but the nervous breathing of my companions. Seated as they were, I doubted whether Halesowen or Lesty could see this apparition, but I was facing directly toward her—for it was a woman.

I could see every line of her figure—the curves of her throat and arms and shoulders, the dull metallic gleaming of her clustering hair. As she extended her hand toward the light, I distinctly saw a large, green stone set in a ring on her index finger.

She must be very beautiful, I thought, and was peering through the gloom in a vain endeavor to see her more closely, when there came a disconcerting crash and utter darkness!

The table whereat we were seated was overturned and I found myself capsize from my chair.

"Hold him!" yelled the voice of Lesty. "Hold him, Halesowen—Clifford!"

A door banged loudly.

"Confound it! I'm on the floor!" I shouted for some one to turn up the light, at the same time scrambling through the gloom with that intent. After severely damaging my shins against the intervening furniture I found the switch.

It would not work!

"It's out of oil!" I cried. "Strike a match, somebody!"

"Haven't got any!" said Lesty.

"Zeda mine!" responded Halesowen. "Open the door!"

"Locked!" was Lesty's next report.

"Break it down!" shouted Halesowen, hurling aside the Japanese screen. "The potsherd is gone!"

Lesty applied his shoulder to the oak-ounce—twice—thrice. Then all together we attacked it, and it flew open with a splintering crash.

"Run down stairs!" panted Halesowen, out on the drive we sprinted into the next entrance and up to the first landing. Knocking and ringing proved ineffectual, and the door was too strong to be burst open.

We stood in dismayed silence, staring at one another.

"Off your balcony, on to his, and then the French window," said Lesty suddenly; so back we all ran again.

I had never before realized how easy it was to get from one balcony to another, until I saw Lesty swing himself across.

Halesowen and I followed in a trice, and we all blundered into the dark room through the open window and made for the electric switch beside the mantelpiece. We turned on the light. The room was unharmed.

"Good Lord!" breathed Halesowen, hurrying into the next.

That, too, was quite bare, as were all the rest. The outer door was locked.

"While we were fooling at that concert he had every scrap of stuff removed!" I said. "He probably had the lot on hire from a big furnishing firm—curios and all. I remember noticing that his curiosity was of a very ordinary character, considering his extensive travels and the nature of his studies."

"No doubt whatever," agreed Lesty. "His burglary proved a failure (and, I think, must have been interrupted), though I am compelled to admit the neat manner in which he handled the very delicate situation that resulted. His more recent and elaborate device has

turned out all that could be desired—from Zeda's point of view."

"How has he got away?" said Halesowen in bewilderment.

"Motor waiting at the corner," replied Lesty promptly. "Heard it come up. When the reading lamp was capsize and whoever had crept from his balcony to yours and in behind the screen had returned the same way—with the vase—Zeda overturned the table and pushed you two men backward in your chairs."

"Then, before I could reach him, he bolted out and locked the door after him. For, having lulled my suspicions by two practically uneventful seances, he cunningly placed himself nearest to the door and me farthest away."

"He probably removed the key when he went out for the box and placed it outside in the lock when he returned. His accomplice had run straight through Zeda's flat and out to the waiting car, and there he joined her. They may be thirty miles away by now!"

Being unable to open the door, we performed returned to Halesowen's balcony by the same way that we had come, our friend bewailing his lost potsherd, cunning scam!"

"I knew he had some deep game in hand," said Lesty; "but I hadn't bargained for this move. Of course, I had noticed the dodge of borrowing all our matches, but I didn't grasp its importance